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## THE PRACTICAL TENDENCIES OF BERGSONISM.<sup>1</sup>

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### I.

THE philosophy of Bergson has ceased to be merely a body of arguments and conclusions contained in certain books; it has become an influence to be reckoned with in the life of our time. It may prove to be a transitory influence; what is undeniable is that it is a far-reaching and a potent one. Nearly all who write at all, from ex-presidents and British premiers to the essayists of women's clubs, seem to feel a call to write of the new philosophy. Bergson's ideas, variously metamorphosed but still recognizable, may be heard on Sunday mornings from the pulpit by the devout, or be absorbed from the Sunday newspapers by the profane. Technical discussions of his doctrines, their meaning, sources, historic

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<sup>1</sup>Le Roy, E. P., "Une philosophie nouvelle: Henri Bergson." Paris, 1912.

Sorel, Georges, "Réflexions sur la violence." Paris, 3d ed., "Les illusions du progrès." Paris, 2d ed., 1911. "L'Evolution Créatrice," in *Le Mouvement Socialiste*, 1907-8.

Guy-Grand, G., "La philosophie syndicaliste." Paris, 1911. Benda, J., "Le Bergsonisme, ou une philosophie de la mobilité." Paris, 1912. Hermann, E., "Eucken and Bergson: Their Signification for Christian Thought." Boston and London, 1912. Desaymard, J., "La pensée d'Henri Bergson." Paris, 1912. Wilbois, "Devoir et durée." Paris, 1912.

affinities, fill our philosophical periodicals; but agreeable expositions of them are also abundant in our popular magazines. And, though hostile critics are not wanting, by far the greater part of all this represents a genuine enthusiasm for the new doctrine. Even the philosophically-learned among Bergson's disciples do not hesitate to rank their master with the two or three supreme figures of the history of thought. "Beyond any doubt," M. Le Roy assures us, "the work of M. Bergson will be accounted in the future one of the most characteristic, the most fruitful and the most glorious achievements of our age. It marks a date which history will not forget; it opens a new phase in metaphysics. It is after full reflection, and with entire consciousness of the meaning of the words, that one may say that the revolution which it brings about is the equal in importance of the Kantian revolution or even of the Socratic."

The reasons for much of this vogue cannot be altogether obscure to anyone who has considered the history and the psychology of philosophical and literary fashions. There is a very evident touch of mystification about this philosophy; and the craving to be mystified is a perennial human craving, which it has, in the more highly civilized ages, been one of the historic functions of philosophy to gratify. What the public wants most from its philosophers is an experience of *initiation*; what it is initiated into is often a matter of secondary importance. Men delight in being ushered past the guarded portal, in finding themselves in dim and awful precincts of thought unknown to the natural man, in experiencing the hushed moment of revelation, and in gazing upon strange symbols,—of which none can tell just what they symbolize. The need for a new sort of philosophic *Eleusinia* is recurrent among the cultivated classes every generation or two; it is a phenomenon almost as periodic as commercial crises. And it cannot be denied that Bergson's is the most Eleusinian of contemporary philosophies,—perhaps the most so since the Hegelian and kindred philosophies of the

Romantic period, with their antithesis of Understanding and Reason, their "higher planes of thinking" which none might enter save those who had been purified from the common logic of the Understanding. With certain of these philosophies, indeed, Bergson's has some very close affinities, not only in what may be called its psychological type, but also in certain particulars of its doctrinal content; though in other particulars it is their exact opposite. By his own statement, his is a philosophy of the ineffable, its central mystery is "repugnant to the very essence of language." And the adepts of the new teaching have the air of going about with monitory fingers on lips and an expression of wondering rapture. One of Bergson's English translators has aptly prefixed to his version, with the author's permission, a motto from Plotinus which is in the true vein of Neo-Platonic mysticism: "If a man were to inquire of Nature the reason of her creative activity and she were willing to give ear and answer, she would say: 'Ask me not, but understand in silence, even as I am silent and am not wont to speak.'"

"It is the idea of mystery," says M. Sorel, "which should control the interpretation" of this philosophy; "for 'Creative Evolution' is a manifesto declaring to the modern world that the principal pre-occupation of philosophers should be to reflect on the mysteries of life." We are assured by M. Rageot that unless one is in some sense born again, one cannot acquire that intuition of the real nature of things which is the secret of the new philosophy. M. Le Roy, in his attempt to describe the effects of the Bergsonian Vision Beatific, falls into language which recalls the last canto of Dante's "Paradiso." "A veil interposed between the real and ourselves, which falls of a sudden, as if an enchantment were dissipated, and leaves open before the mind depths of light hitherto unimagined, wherein is revealed before our very eyes, for the first time, reality itself: such is the feeling which is experienced at every page, with singular intensity, by the reader of M. Bergson,"—or at all events, by M.

Le Roy. "It is a revelation which none who has once received it can ever forget. No words can convey this impression of direct and intimate vision. All that one has hitherto thought is renewed, rejuvenated, as by the freshness of the morning: and everywhere, in the light of that dawn, bud and flower new intuitions, which are felt also to be rich in infinite consequences, heavy and as it were saturated with life, endlessly fertile." And yet "one feels also as if one had always had, in some mysterious penumbra of consciousness, a dim presentiment of that which is now disclosed." Here, clearly, is a philosophy which presents itself as a kind of revelation, and produces in its initiates something approaching the true mystical ecstasy.<sup>2</sup>

The fact that a philosophy gratifies the craving for a sense of initiation proves nothing either for or against it. Profound and serious philosophies may sometimes do this,—though seldom, perhaps, in the highest degree; and irresponsible and superficial philosophies may do it. The question concerning the value and the ultimate practical tendency of the ideas which a philosophy contains is independent of the question concerning the qualities by which it charms and captivates the mind of a generation. Ideas, after all, even philosophies of the ineffable always contain; since a philosopher must say something, and must say something different, and must even go through at least the form of connected reasoning. And, paradoxical though it may appear, not all philosophies of the unutterable are indistinguishable. There are very different ways of describing that which ostensibly

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<sup>2</sup> There are, of course, also many things in the special doctrinal content of Bergson's philosophy which help to make it peculiarly congenial to our time. Any attempt at a complete historical explanation of the popular success and wide acceptance of this philosophy would necessarily take account of these more specific factors. But such an attempt cannot be made within the limits of this paper. I may remark, however, that Bergson's vogue is certainly due in part to the peculiarity of which I shall more than once have occasion to speak,—his habit of affirming both sides of nearly all issues, and thus of seeming sympathetic to nearly all types of opinion.

cannot be described, and the ways differ in their effects upon the ethical attitudes of the initiates. It is, therefore, worth while to scrutinize the practical bearings, the implicit moral and religious ideas, of a teaching so widely diffused and so enthusiastically followed.

Neither on the philosophy of religion nor on ethics has Bergson himself ever said much directly and connectedly. "Religion," as M. Le Roy observes, "is a word which has never yet fallen from his pen." And on moral problems Bergson himself declares that "it is not certain that he will ever publish anything." He will do so, he adds, only if he hereafter reaches in this field "results as demonstrable, or as 'monstrable' " as those in his other works. He apparently, therefore, does not regard his doctrines thus far given to the world as containing any clear or necessary implications with respect to moral issues. But, fortunately or otherwise, it is impossible for a philosopher to say to his ideas "Thus far shalt thou go and no farther." The thing has often been tried, notoriously by Kant, but with equally notorious failure. Even the ingenious founder of Christian Science, who was able to employ unusually drastic measures to this end, has not been able to restrict her followers absolutely to the unaltered iteration of her *ipsissima verba*. What Sir Henry Maine has said of political theories is true of all widely prevalent philosophical ideas: "They are endowed with the faculty possessed by the hero of the Border ballad. When their legs are smitten off they fight upon their stumps. They produce a host of words, and of ideas associated with those words, which remain active and combatant after the parent speculation is mutilated or dead." Not only do they survive the theory which supported them; they also exhibit, during its lifetime, an existence and a development relatively independent of that theory and entirely independent of the author of it. M. Bergson's admirers, therefore, even in this early stage of the growth of his school, have not failed to draw from his teachings moral and religious

consequences which he has himself thus far refused to recognize or refrained from making explicit. Moreover, he has himself recently consented to set forth the relation of his metaphysics to at least one of the traditional questions of theology,—and it proves to be a relation which few, assuredly, of the readers of his books can have apprehended for themselves. In what follows I shall try both to discriminate and analyze those elements in Bergson's own teaching which appear to contain moral or religious implications in a latent form; and also to point out how some of these implications have in fact been drawn out by his disciples. At a general criticism and evaluation I shall make no attempt until the analysis and exposition is concluded.

“A philosopher worthy of the name,” M. Bergson has recently remarked, “never says more than one thing; indeed, he rather strives to say it than says it. For he never sees more than one point.” The epigram has that air of paradoxical profundity which charms an admiring public; but it is eminently untrue. Every philosophy thus far discovered can be shown to have been generated by a more or less complicated interworking of diverse dialectical motives and of temperamental inclinations. Certainly Bergson himself has said, and, therefore, no doubt, has seen, a great many things,—things which neither always follow one from another, nor even always avoid contradicting one another. The ideas in Bergson's philosophy are a singularly mixed assortment,—a fact disguised from many of his readers by the smooth and pleasant flow of his style and his felicity in coining metaphors. To harmonize his doctrine, to reduce it to a unity, is to leave out its most distinguishing trait. Extreme diversities of interpretation are naturally to be found among his expositors, whether critical or sympathetic. Professor Kemp Smith finds in him “a detailed and very definite contribution towards the establishment of realism”; Professor Calkins thinks him “first and foremost a personalist, an idealist of the renaissance spiritual-

istic school." He has been classified as pragmatist and as mystic, as pluralist and as monist, as a temporalist and as a modern Eleatic, as a believer in an immanent and as a believer in a transcendent Deity. And the truth is that he is all of these things at once; that is to say, he employs, and employs repeatedly, arguments and modes of expression which imply each and all of them. The practical tendencies which flow from his teaching may therefore be expected to be correspondingly diverse. Everything will depend upon the element in his theoretical philosophy which is taken as the starting point for ethical or religious developments.

There is, it is true, one note which resounds from Bergson's pages more often than any other. It is the call to a return to the primitive, to a recovery of an original simplicity which has been overlaid with the sophistications of the intellect, to a reabsorption in the immediate. The intuition which we must gain, if we would be admitted into the circle of the *illuminati* (however elusive and hard to acquire) is not a new intuition; it is but the restoration of a lost possession. We are, in the words of M. Le Roy, to "recapture a virginal purity of vision, freed from the habits acquired in the course of the life of action."<sup>3</sup> M. Bergson is the Rousseau of metaphysics, seeking to bring back, not society, but the psychic life of the individual, to a state of nature. Primarily, no doubt, this was for the philosopher himself merely a methodological suggestion for the solution of the metaphysician's problem, that of determining the "ultimate nature of reality." But even in his own thought this conception has long since ceased to be merely a speculative theorem, and has become a program for a sort of inward regeneration. To

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<sup>3</sup> It is this conception which M. Le Roy emphasizes above all others in his exposition of "la philosophie nouvelle"; and the exposition has received the full approval of M. Bergson. His interpreter, he writes, "has seized, over and above the method, the *intention* and the *spirit*" of his doctrine; no study of it "could be more conscientious or more faithful." It manifests, on the part of the interpreter, *une profonde sympathie de pensée* with the philosophy interpreted (pp. IV, V).



"recall our perception to its original character," is for Bergson not merely the way to philosophic insight; it apparently is, in his eyes, also the way to the attainment of the supreme good. If, he writes, this knowledge through intuition ever becomes a general possession, "it is not speculation alone that will profit. Every-day life, too, will be warmed and illumined thereby. . . . When we habituate ourselves to see all things *sub specie durationis*, then at once what was stiff and strained in our galvanized perception becomes relaxed, what was asleep wakes, what was dead is brought to life again. The satisfaction which art can give only to those favored by nature and by fortune, and to them only at long intervals, such satisfactions philosophy, as here understood, will bring to all men at every moment, by breathing once more the breath of life into the phantoms which surround them, and by vivifying men themselves. Thus philosophy will be complementary to science in the realm of practice not less than that of speculation. The applications of science to the convenience of human life can promise us only comfort or, at most, pleasure. But philosophy can give us *joy*."<sup>4</sup> Clearly, it has, after all, not been without encouragement from the master that the disciples have sought to apply his philosophy "in the realm of practice" as well as in "that of speculation"; and the manner in which they have for the most part made the application has been such as he has here indicated: namely, through the assumption that the "return to the immediate" gives not only the supremely illuminating insight, but also the supremely desirable experience.

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"'L'Intuition philosophique'" in *Rev. de Mét. et de Morale*, XIX, 1911, pp. 826-27. In spite of the above passage, M. Bergson, in a letter published in 1912 (*Études par des Pères de la Compagnie de Jésus*, vol. 130, p. 515), took the position already mentioned,—a position of unwillingness to discuss ethical questions, on the ground that, thus far, no philosophical conclusions upon these questions had been reached by him by the application of his intuitional method. Since writing the paragraph above, I find that Mr. Irving Babbitt has already dwelt upon the analogy between Bergson and Rousseau (*The Nation*, Nov. 14, 1912).

But what is the nature of this "immediacy" to which we are to return? When we penetrate beneath the incrustation of conceptual thought to the *données immédiates* of consciousness, what is it that we find there, at the heart of our existence? Here is the point at which the characteristic Bergsonian ambiguities begin. The saving contact with the real, as we have seen, is to be had through "intuition"; but of the content of this intuition the most various and irreconcilable accounts are given. There is, I think, almost no type of experience, except that of analytical thinking, with which it is not somewhere identified; and scarcely any attempt,—certainly no coherent and intelligible attempt,—is made to show that these differing versions are equivalent or even harmonious. There are, therefore, as many types of ethical or religious tendency potentially derivable from the doctrine as there are in it diverse statements of the nature of intuition.

Certain negative requisites to this experience are, indeed, laid down with great frequency and emphasis, and are consistent and closely related *inter se*; though they are neither closely related nor consistent with many other things which Bergson says. There are certain phases of life which, we are often and plainly told, we must turn our backs upon, if we would have a full and intuitive acquaintance with "the deeper self" that is in us, *le moi profond*. We must, namely, turn away from logical thought; and from action; and from the conditions of social life. It is no trifling *katharsis* which is required of the candidates for this initiation.

We must turn away from logical thought; because the intellect, a late-born product of evolution, is but a spinner of convenient and conventional ways of symbolizing reality, not a means of apprehending reality as it is. It weaves, as Schopenhauer and the Vedântists taught, a veil of *Mâyâ* which it hangs between us and that true Being to which we would penetrate, that Being which is at bottom, for Bergson too, an *âtman*, the very Self of

our selves. The intellect, with its inveterate habit of making distinctions, of thinking things as "outside of" one another, of thinking the moments of time as "before and after" one another, wholly misrepresents the nature of a Self in which all is fusion and interpenetration.

It is true that both M. Bergson and some of his admirers are wont to repel the imputation of anti-intellectualism. Thus M. Desaymard, impressed by the considerable erudition evident in "Matière et Mémoire," declares that philosophy, as conceived by the author of that work, "far from opposing positive science, actually demands of the philosopher a scientific effort far greater than it has hitherto been customary to expect from him. The 'intuition' of the philosopher cannot come into play until after he has inventoried, probed, criticized, often even added to, all the facts which positive science has brought together, in relation to a given subject. . . . This philosophy is not 'anti-scientific'; it is 'ultra-scientific.'" These declarations can be abundantly supported from Bergson's own text; for example, by such a sentence as this, which Mrs. Herman cites from "L'Évolution Créatrice" as decisive evidence of the philosopher's innocence of hostility to the intellect: "Reality itself in the profoundest meaning of the word is reached by the combined and progressive development of science and philosophy." But while Bergson says these things in his books, and still more emphatically in a discourse provoked by criticisms, before the *Société française de philosophie*, it remains an equally emphasized, and, logically, a far more central point of his doctrine that reality can be reached only by a process in which the categories, the methods, and the fundamental presuppositions, not merely of physical science, but of all conceptual thought, are suppressed. We have here merely one instance of the facility and composure with which this writer says and unsays the same things. If there are any propositions in Bergson's philosophy more fundamental and more distinctive than others, they

are these: that the "deeper reality" is non-spatial and non-quantitative, is indivisible, continuous, mobile, fluid, ever novel; and that "intelligence" is capable of apprehending only the spatial, the quantified, the divisible, the discrete, the immobile, the solid, the recurrent. Thus intelligence is generically incapacitated for introducing us to "the real." Nor does Bergson fail to drive this conclusion home by reiteration and diversified expression. "The intellect is characterized by a natural inability to comprehend life";<sup>5</sup> but life constitutes "all that is *positive* in reality."<sup>6</sup> "The intellect can no more admit complete novelty than real becoming; that is to say, here again it lets an essential aspect of life escape, as if it were not intended to think such an object. All our analyses lead us to this conclusion."<sup>5</sup>

In view of all this, M. Bergson's bold declaration that he has never belittled science as a means of gaining acquaintance with reality, "never declared that we need to replace intelligence by something else," cannot be regarded as a wholly accurate generalization about his previous utterances. Even his attempts elsewhere to represent intellectual exercises as a suitable propædæutic to the intuitive insight are without logical motivation; they do not flow from the rest of his doctrine, nor are they congruous with it. "An intuition of reality," he declares in his "Introduction to Metaphysics," "can be had only after one has gained its confidence through a long companionship with its more superficial manifestations. . . . The direct contact of the Self with the Self, the final effort of distinct intuition, would be impossible, except to one who had first assembled and compared a very large number of psychological analyses." But one strives in vain to imagine why, if to attain "the metaphysical intuition" we must "reverse all the ordinary habits" of conceptual thought and analytical reasoning,

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<sup>5</sup> "Évolution créatrice," Eng. tr., pp. 164, 165.

<sup>6</sup> *Journal of Philosophy*, etc., VII, p. 388.

a prolonged immersion in those habits should render this emancipation more easy,—unless, indeed, the effect of such habituation be to breed a disgust or a despair of the intellect. The only consistently Bergsonian ground for regarding intellectual endeavor as an aid to intuition would resemble the ground which some ascetic moralists have found for condoning an intense early addiction to the pursuit of pleasure:—that it the more surely brings about that disillusion which begets the desire for something more satisfying. One remains, then, entirely justified in saying that, by Bergson's express assertions, and also by the general logic of his most fundamental principles, the much-to-be-desired intuition is to be had only by turning away from the intellect and all its works.

Equally involved in the fundamentals of the doctrine is the requirement that we turn away from action. The supposition that Bergson is a pragmatist is, indeed, not without support from his actual utterances. But his pragmatism, as several recent writers have clearly pointed out, is but a subsidiary 'moment' in his philosophy, one which is sublated in the final synthesis,—if there can be said to be a final synthesis. He holds, as do those called pragmatists, that our intellect, with its forms and characteristic modes of operation, was evolved for the sake of action, and is to be understood solely as instrumental to action. But what the intellect is, we have seen; and what action is responsible for, we may therefore infer. The first work of the impulse to action was to fabricate the intellect as its tool; and the entire work of that tool is to shape for us an image of the world as the world's not. *Why* it should work in so strange a fashion, and why a gratuitous misrepresentation of reality should be the necessary presupposition of action, remains obscure; there are few passages of Bergson's more bewilderingly crowded with self-contradictions than the pages in "Creative Evolution" which profess to show not only how but why the intellect and its categories, and especially its trick of thinking in terms

of space and of "solids," were evolved in the interest of action out of a supposed antecedent state in which, by hypothesis, no intellect, nor categories, nor space, nor solids, nor possibility of action, existed at all. But however this may be, it remains true that there are few principles which Bergson reiterates more frequently than that all modes of thinking which have reference to action or are in any degree influenced by the presuppositions of action, are modes of thinking which lead us directly and hopelessly away from that intuition of reality which he would have us gain. On this side of his doctrine his call for a return to the immediate is nothing less than a call to the contemplative life, to a beholding which transcends all need of doing. Or, if this way of putting it be thought to have a too 'otherworldly' sound, one may say that the way to experience real duration (according to the present version of it) would be to 'loaf and invite one's soul,' to lie inert and let time flow through one, without distinction of moments, without action, without any of the sophistications due to "intelligence."

Here again, to be sure, we find what is clearly affirmed equally clearly denied; Bergson elsewhere insists that intuition does *not* "consist simply in watching oneself live, 'like an idle shepherd watching the stream flow by.' To speak in this way would be to fail to apprehend the peculiar nature of duration, and the essentially active—nay, the almost violent—character of the metaphysical intuition." But here as before the denial has neither logical roots in the general doctrine nor logical consistency with it—unless, indeed, we are being treated to a play upon the word 'action.' Essential to all that is coherent and distinctive in Bergson's view of knowledge is the contention that action (as he ordinarily uses the word) is conditioned upon the intellect's falsification of reality, and is, therefore, utterly contrary in its nature to the reality-revealing intuition. Only, it is a way with our philosopher to negate even his most essential and

characteristic doctrines, when they seem to suggest any implication to which objection might naturally be made; or, perhaps one should say, to affirm their opposites, when the rejection of the opposites would give rise to objection.

We must, finally, turn away from the social life. For, in a secondary degree, the intellect exists as a means for social communication, as that which makes "discourse" possible. Not merely language, but the concepts which language expresses, and the "laws of thought" themselves, are conventions of social intercourse; in the lack of them social intercourse would be impossible, the idea of it meaningless. But of these conventions we must rid ourselves, if we would reach consciousness in its natural state, if we would have contact with the "immediately given." It is no society of selves, acting, and acting with and upon one another, that can be presented to us in the Bergsonian intuition of pure immediacy. The experience is an absolutely solitary one; and the "reality" which it could disclose would, necessarily, according to Bergson's principles, be one in which the "reciprocal externality" of personalities, no less than that of moments of time or points of space, would be annihilated.<sup>7</sup>

These negative prerequisites to the attainment of the Bergsonian "intuition" are laid down, then, in unmistakable terms and with copious iteration, though not without occasional denial. But when one endeavors to gather some notion of the actual content or object of that intuition, one is oppressed with something more than

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<sup>7</sup> It may, however, be noted, as a small example of the way in which the categories of Bergson's philosophy reverse their meaning without notice, that in his "Laughter," intelligent conformity to the social requirements of a situation is treated as a case of "mobility" and as in some degree a manifestation of "life"; while the comic, which is made to consist in inadaptability and non-conformity, is an example of "rigidity." Yet the former is obviously also an expression of intellect and of a capacity for making nice distinctions, is wholly a product of social intercourse, and is a form of "discourse."

an embarrassment of riches. Ineffable though the reality therein revealed is said to be, there are offered at least six different and irreconcilable descriptions of it.

(1) The first conception of what is given us in intuition is merely the consequence of the negations thus far noted. The object intuited is the absolute Unity of which the mystical philosophies and theologies of all the ages have darkly spoken. It bears, indeed, the novel name of "pure duration," but it is a mode of being from which all the ordinary attributes of time have, with utmost explicitness, been excluded. It has no "before" or "after." In it one instant is not "outside of" another instant. The ideas of number and quantity and serial order are not applicable to it. This existence, which contains, indeed, all time, yet contains neither "reciprocally external" moments nor spatially juxtaposed parts, does not seem easily distinguishable from that point

dove s'appunta ogni *ubi* ed ogni *quando*,

which the poet beheld at the culmination of his vision. And the relation of him who intuits pure duration to the nature intuited is likewise described in terms analogous to those customary in the mystical philosophies. The intuition is, no doubt, a cognitive act. But it transcends the ordinary meaning of 'knowing'; for in it, since all 'externality' of things to one another has been suppressed, one *becomes* that which one knows. "To this immediacy," says M. Le Roy, "we must accord the value of absolute knowledge, since it realizes the coincidence of being and knowing." When we return to it we return to a "moment of consciousness anterior to that work of reflection from which arises the duality of subject and object."

This first account of the content of the Bergsonian intuition manifestly offers nothing unfamiliar; and it contains nothing which could help us to understand why (for example) Bergson has become the favorite philosopher of revolutionary syndicalism. The tendency which this conception alone would seem most likely to foster



would be a revival of 'otherworldly' mysticism. And that is an outcome which may very well follow from the vogue of the new philosophy, in the case of those who fix their attention exclusively upon this aspect of it. With Bergson himself it is an incessantly emphasized aspect; but it is not the only one, nor the most distinctive one, nor the one that has thus far most influenced his disciples. What is really distinctive of his philosophy is its transformation-scene. For this negatively characterized entity with which we have hitherto been dealing, this pure Unity, perfectly indivisible, remote from all action because untouched by those distinctions and categories which action presupposes,—this self-same entity suddenly, without explanation or transition, presents itself as pure mobility; and as time in its actual flow; and as the turbid movement of sentience and appetite below the level of coherent thought; and as a developing, active, self-differentiating life-force. And it is these complementary and more positive descriptions of the content of the final intuition that have been chiefly fertile in practical consequences.

We turn, then, to the remaining, and more genuinely temporalistic versions of the "peculiar nature of duration and of the character of the metaphysical intuition;" and shall in each case note the moods of social, ethical or religious thought to which they seem to tend.

(2) One characteristic emphasis is upon the *absolute-ness* of the mobility which is the root-character of conscious existence. M. Bergson, though he fills many other and very different rôles also, is, of course, a modern Heraclitus; and the 'immediacy' to which he would have our souls return is the universal flux about which the philosopher of Ephesus uttered his dark sayings. "Heraclitus," Mr. George Santayana has said, "describing the immediate, found it to be in constant and pervasive change; no substance, no forms, no identities could be arrested there; but as in the human soul, so in nature, all was instability, contradiction, reconstruction." And

this, as Mr. Santayana goes on to observe, was no false description of what consciousness untransformed by thought is:

This remains the empirical fact; we need but to rescind the artificial distinction which Descartes taught us to make between nature and life, to feel again the absolute aptness of Heraclitus's expressions. These were thought obscure only because they were so disconcertingly penetrating and direct. The immediate is what nobody sees, because convention and reflection turn existence, as soon as they can, into ideas; a man who discloses the immediate seems profound, yet his depth is nothing but innocence recovered and a sort of intellectual abstention. Mysticism, scepticism, and transcendentalism have all in their various ways tried to fall back on the immediate; but none of them has been ingenuous enough. Each has added some myth, or sophistry, or delusive artifice to its direct observation. Heraclitus remains the honest prophet of immediacy.

Bergson has evidently tried to be to our own age an honest prophet of immediacy; and Mr. Santayana, whose words require some modification when applied to the ancient thinker, has here very exactly set forth at least one element in the philosophy of the modern. Like his Greek precursor Bergson strains the resources of language in his endeavor to make clear that what is at the bottom of our consciousness is change and *nothing but* change, that reality in its true nature is simply *flux posé sur flux*.<sup>8</sup>

What results when this Heraclitean immediacy is made not merely the subject of psychological description or a partial element in a metaphysical synthesis, but the object of a sort of religious cult, is exemplified by M. A. Chide in his "Le mobilisme moderne." To M. Chide the "*idée bergsonienne*" represents the culmination of all modern philosophy, because it evidences at last the complete recovery from that misleading "logification" of the nature of the world and of human life, which began with the philosophers of Elea, or rather with the law-giver of Sinai. Approximations to this insight have been made by many philosophers, especially in the nine-

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<sup>8</sup> *Journal of Philosophy, etc.*, VII, 1910, p. 388.

teenth century. The diverse types of evolutionism to be found in the Hegelian dialectic, the Darwinian biology, the Spencerian cosmology, were all stages on the way to the great consummation, the apotheosis of movement as such. Yet none of these were wholly disentangled from "rationalism." But in our own happy day, M. Chide finds, the full emancipation is at hand, through the efforts of Bergson. At last "movement" finds its cause triumphant, or nearly so, and seeks no longer to dissimulate its true essence. "Immutability, once set at the heart of the world, becomes for modern science a simple illusion, due to categories fundamentally vitiated. . . . And the real, perceived directly in intuition and not through the medium of these falsified categories, appears as what it is, *Becoming*, beyond all logic. . . . The idea of movement has thus found its courage, and, taking leave of the Reason, gives itself up to its own essential nature, which consists above all in caprice. Proteus is God."<sup>9</sup>

Just what consequences follow from this faith that 'Proteus alone is God and Bergson is his prophet,' M. Chide does not trouble to tell us with much definiteness. Perhaps it is but consistent that the drawing of consequences should be left to each man's taste,—though in a religion which apotheosizes caprice, consistency can scarcely be a virtue. But some other Bergsonians (whom I know only through the summaries and citations in M. Guy-Grand's admirable little book) appear to point the moral with a little more explicitness. Thus M. Albert Bazaillas<sup>10</sup> bids us find in the æsthetic experience, above all in music, a sort of evanescence of the intellect and a dissolution of personality, in which the Bergsonian intuition is consummated. In this experience, in M. Bazaillas's words (which can hardly be adequately Englished), "*tout nous parle de vertige et*

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<sup>9</sup> "Le mobilisme moderne," pp. 257-259.

<sup>10</sup> In his "Musique et inconscience." Paris, 1908.

*d'alanguissement.*" Here is "a world of the irrational, dedicated to absurdity, where nothing recalls to us objectivity or certitude, where contradiction is the rule, where there is no impulse to which Imagination does not give encouragement,—for she reigns there supreme, clear-seeing and subtle, in the place of the methods and the traditions of Thought." Again, in M. Maxime Leroy's volume, "*La Loi*,"<sup>11</sup> we appear to have the social philosophy which follows from this phase of Bergsonism. It is, of course, a social philosophy closely verging upon that of anarchism. M. Leroy laments that our modern democracies still make so much of a fetich of the idea of law in the abstract. No law ought to be regarded as rigorously obligatory; general laws should in the main be replaced by free contracts between individuals. For,—in M. Guy-Grand's phrasing,—“any rigid and stable law intended to apply to any large country, necessarily hampers life.”

(3) The four remaining ways in which Bergson describes the content of his “intuition” all take some account of the conception of evolution. What is fundamental in life,—as it is represented in these passages,—is not *mere* change, but change of a definite and cumulative sort. The ultimate reality is, in this case, *not* absolute mobility, but a force with a determinate character or a prevailing direction of its own. But in the first of his evolutionary versions of the fundamental reality, Bergson still inclines to attach superior value to that which is primal and universal in this life-force. The evolutionism of Spencer had, perhaps, in the days when it was a novelty, its most significant practical effect in the fostering of a forward-looking habit of mind in its adherents; it was a new sort of chiliasm. But Bergson brings even to his evolutionism a curiously backward-looking habit of mind.<sup>12</sup> This is, no doubt, the conse-

<sup>11</sup> Paris, 1908.

<sup>12</sup> A peculiar fondness for words beginning with the prefix *re-* is a characteristic of Bergson's style.

quence of a way of thinking about the object of intuition which had become customary with him before that object had been thought of very definitely in evolutionary terms. From the beginning, as we have seen, Bergson has been the preacher of a return to the 'underlying.' At the outset, this meant merely a repenetration to a supposed deeper level of human consciousness from which action and the intellect have caused most men to depart. But in "Creative Evolution," where the reality intuited usually is described as sort of blind, striving *poussée vitale*, the phrases inviting us to return to this reality often seem to suggest a reversion to that which is common to all life, and, therefore, relatively unevolved and undifferentiated. The democratic spirit has been defined by Mr. Chesterton as consisting in a feeling that the things in which all men are alike are infinitely more important than the things in which some men differ from others. There is, in the present phase of Bergsonism, much not merely to encourage such a democratic spirit, but even to widen it into a feeling that the things in which all men and all animals are alike,—and should not one in consistency add, all vegetables?—are more sacred and more important than the things in which men differ from what a more aristocratically-minded age called the lower orders of creation. Deeper than clear consciousness lies *une certaine inquiétude de vie*: deeper than intelligence lies instinct. For, "while intelligence is characterized by a natural inability to comprehend life, instinct is moulded upon the very form of life itself. While intelligence treats all things mechanically, instinct proceeds, if one may so speak, organically. . . . For it does but continue the labor by which life organizes matter, so that we can never say just where organization ends and instinct begins." If, then, the chief end of man is resorption into the heart of that life which stirs in all things,—if we are to *live* this life inwardly and immediately, and not merely to behold or think or understand it,—then, by a clear implication, the promptings of

instinct must bring us nearer to that goal than the guidance of intelligence; though even instinct, since it is also a means to action, will not lead us the whole way. The difficulty about instinct is that, *almost* reaching the goal, it is incapable of feeling the need of going farther; intelligence becomes conscious of the need but is incapable of fulfilling it. "There are things which intelligence alone is able to seek, but which by itself alone it will never find. These things instinct alone could find; but it will never seek them." This is a rather oracular deliverance. But if one is permitted to guess at the interpretation of the oracle, one must still regard it as implying that intelligence, having the inclination to seek these ineffable things, should be intelligent enough to seek them in the only way by which they may be found,—namely, through an act of self-negation and a return to instinct,—or to something still more primitive. It is true that M. Bergson himself, in reply to a critic, has denied that he has ever maintained that we ought to give to instinct the preference over intelligence. It is true also that M. Sorel has endeavored to reassure another critic, "alarmed by the danger of the popularization of a doctrine which contains, among other paradoxes, the thesis that instinct is the real source of the highest kind of knowledge." And it is, indeed, a fact that this is not the only or the final word of the new philosophy upon the nature of that underlying reality which it is so persistently prone to identify with the supreme good. For this contention, too, a precise contradiction may be duly found in Bergson's writings. But the practical effect of this procedure is no more in this case than in others already noted, to reduce both sides of the contradiction to a nullity. Those who care to follow in detail the self-contradictions of Bergson's doctrine with respect to the relation of instinct to the saving intuition, will do well to read the penetrating, though somewhat too ferocious, criticism of M. Benda.

(4) In one or two passages Bergson designates one in-

instinct above all others as revelatory of the meaning of existence: the instinct of maternal devotion. He thus derives from the ideal of a return to the instinctive at least the hint of a genuinely evolutionary and forward-looking conception: the conception of life as significant chiefly in its transmissive function, of the passing generation as a bridge through which the race that is to be shall enter into its own. "Sometimes," he writes, "in a fleeting vision, the invisible breath that bears all living beings onward is materialized before our eyes. We have this sudden illumination before certain forms of maternal love, so striking, so touching, too, in most animals, observable even in the solicitude of the plant for its seed. This love, in which some have seen the great mystery of life, may rather, perhaps, disclose to us life's secret. It shows us each generation bending over the generation that is to follow it. It enables us to perceive by a sudden glimpse that a living being is above all a place of passage and that the essential thing in life is the movement by which life is transmitted." In this interpretation of the content of "intuition," Bergson's doctrine has manifest affinities with some familiar ethical emphases of other and older evolutionary moralists, both systematic and impressionistic; for example, with certain wholesome aspects of the Whitman cult, with a part of the preaching of Nietzsche's Zarathustra, with the aspirations which characterize the enthusiasts over eugenics. This particular moral idea, in short, is in no degree novel or distinctive in Bergsonism. And it is, perhaps, the version of its intuition which the new philosophy least emphasizes and least frequently iterates.

It is not in any of the four versions of the nature of intuition thus far distinguished that the most noteworthy practical applications of the new philosophy have found their starting-points. The two which remain to be examined are those which appear to have had the greatest actual influence, and to have encouraged, if they have not generated, contemporary tendencies of most significance.

The consideration of these, however, must be deferred until a subsequent installment of this study.

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## A STATISTICIAN'S IDEA OF PROGRESS.

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**F**EW convictions are more deep seated and more widely held in our modern world, especially in the United States, than the belief that man is progressing. Is the belief to be accepted and defended or is it a delusion, a mere idol of the tribe?

Before the question can be argued the nature of progress must be examined. Progress is a kind or species of change; it implies gradual alteration towards some limit. It does not necessarily imply improvement. The progress of consumption does not bring any improvement of the patient and to speak of an improvement of the disease is hardly intelligible. When Hogarth made his series of engravings on *A Rake's Progress*, the title did not imply that the last position of the hero in Bedlam was an improvement on the first, but merely that it was the culmination of a gradual process. Progress, then, is change towards an end and the end may be moral, immoral or non-moral. Progress depends upon the idea of what constitutes the completed series of changes; in other words, it is a subjective notion.

But scientific critics assert that nature knows nothing of ends or final causes and hence knows nothing of progress. If man be merely a part of nature, the idea of progress must be read into history and not read out of it. History, or a part of it, is interpreted in terms of progress as certain vibrations of the air are interpreted in terms of music. A measure of progress or even an argument about progress is as impossible as a measure